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AUTHOR	Ysseldyke, James E.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an analysis of inclusion as it relates to national goals, national standards, and national tests for students with disabilities. Concerning the six national education goals specified in Goals 2000, the paper finds that the primary data collection programs used to document progress toward the goals exclude 40 to 50 percent of students with disabilities. Concerning national standards, the paper points out that experts in math believe that established standards are somewhat appropriate for students with disabilities but not feasible for implementation with most students with disabilities. Concerning state and national testing, the paper reports that most states use large scale assessments and do not include students with disabilities, and when students with disabilities are included, their data often are not reported. In each area, the paper describes efforts being made to address concerns and additional actions that can be taken to improve services. (JDD)

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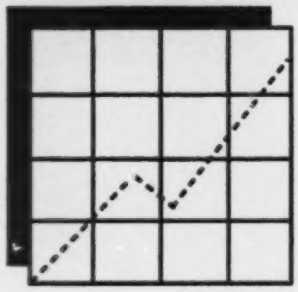

National Goals, National Standards, National Tests: Concerns for All (Not Virtually All) Students With Disabilities?

National Center on Educational Outcomes

The College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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in collaboration with

St. Cloud State University
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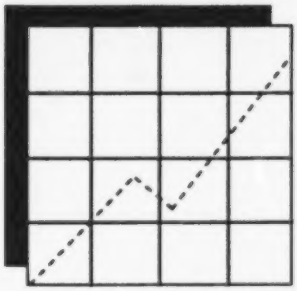

National Goals, National Standards, National Tests: Concerns for All (Not Virtually All) Students With Disabilities?

Prepared by:
James E. Ysseldyke, Martha Thurlow, Bob Algozzine,
James Shriner, and Cheri Gilman

National Center on Educational Outcomes

This report is a paper based on a presentation made to a House and Senate Education Committee Staff Briefing by James E. Ysseldyke on March 16, 1992. Because of recent national legislation, the concepts presented in this paper remain particularly relevant.

November, 1993

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), established in 1990, works with state departments of education, national policy-making groups, and others to facilitate and enrich the development and use of indicators of educational outcomes for students with disabilities. It is believed that responsible use of such indicators will enable students with disabilities to achieve better results from their educational experiences. The Center represents a collaborative effort of the University of Minnesota, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, and St. Cloud State University.

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Publications Office
NCEO
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Abstract

Arguing about where students with disabilities should receive specialized instruction is the latest area to catch the heat of professional rhetoric in special education. Part of a broader issue, inclusion (i.e., deciding who, where, and when to include students with disabilities) has become the catchphrase of the 90s. This paper provides an analysis of inclusion as it relates to national goals, national standards, and national tests for students with disabilities. Efforts to address these concerns as well as actions that can be taken to improve services to students with disabilities are described.

National Goals, National Standards, National Tests:
Concerns For All (Not Virtually All) Students With Disabilities?

Arguing about where students with disabilities should go to school is the biggest brouhaha to capture the hearts and minds of special educators in some time. Some argue in favor of placing all students in their home schools and others want to see placements outside home schools maintained as options in the "least restrictive environment" continuum. The movement not to exclude students with disabilities from experiences available to their neighbors and peers has come to be known as inclusion and its goals are hard to defile.

As described in the New Mexico State Department of Education's Administrative Policy on Full Inclusion (Morgan, 1992), full inclusion means that all children are educated in supported, heterogeneous, age-appropriate, dynamic, natural, child-focused classroom, school, and community environments. Full inclusion means open doors, accessibility, proximity, friends, support, and valuing diversity. Full inclusion means attending a school of choice, attending classes with neighbors and natural peers, and participating in school and community activities that maximize social development of everyone. Schools that practice full inclusion take responsibility for the learning of all students. Full inclusion is given weight by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which calls for serving students with disabilities in "least restrictive environments," by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act which guarantees people with disabilities access to services provided by federally funded agencies, and by the Americans with Disabilities Act which requires that employers make work facilities readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992).

Albeit soft, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has an adopted policy on inclusion.

> CEC believes that a continuum of services must be available for all children, youth, and young adults. CEC also believes that the concept of inclusion is a meaningful goal to be pursued in our schools and communities. In addition, CEC believes children, youth, and young adults with disabilities should be served whenever possible in general education classrooms, in inclusive neighborhood schools and community settings. Such settings should be strengthened and supported by an infusion of specially trained personnel and other appropriate supportive practices according to the individual needs of the child. (CEC, 1993)

The softness (i.e., "served <u>whenever possible</u> in general education classrooms") creates complexity and confusion when deciding whom to include and when to include them. The softness also opens the door for the language of "virtually all" students to creep into the dialogue when establishing policies for students with disabilities in the name of inclusionary practices.

Accepting "virtually all" is a matter of assigning convenience to a difficult task. In matters related to difficult decisions, virtually all makes difficult tasks a little easier. Key here is that "not to exclude" is different from "include" because the former implies expected and justifiable presence that should not be compromised rather than expected and justifiable absence that should be adjusted. And, it all comes to rest when considering the place of students with disabilities in practices of educational reform, a key component of which includes the establishment of national goals and a system for evaluating the extent to which students are achieving them. The implications of addressing this aspect of reform relative to students with disabilities spill over into issues related to state and national testing programs.

Six national education goals are driving contemporary educational practice and there is consistent rhetoric that the goals are for <u>all</u> students. As a measure of achievement of these goals, national task forces, panels and committees are encouraging the development of world class

standards for pupil performance, especially in basic skills areas. For the most part, students with disabilities are out of sight and out of mind in this important effort (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 1992). Anderson (1992) concluded that the current reform efforts pertain to 90% of the students in America's schools. The 10% with exceptional needs are overlooked in most activities. What are the implications for students with disabilities of widespread acceptance and implementation of any "national" goals? Similarly, should we have a separate set of standards for students with disabilities, or should we expect a range of performance relative to any standards that are widely accepted?

State and national tests are administered to provide policymakers with information for making policy decisions relative to the achievement of goals and standards. When any portion of the school population is excluded, serious concerns arise when compiling, reporting, and interpreting scores (Algozzine, 1993; McGrew, Spiegel, Thurlow, & Shriner, 1992). Using different definitions or methods for grouping and describing them also causes problems. The focus of this paper is an analysis of what is known about national goals, national standards, and national tests as they relate to concerns for students with disabilities and educational reform. We also describe efforts to address these concerns and outline additional actions that can be taken to improve services to all students, including those with disabilities.

National Goals

Six national education goals are specified in Goals 2000 (continuing the Bush education reform act known as America 2000). There is consistent and continuing rhetoric that says the goals are for all students. What are the implications for students with disabilities of widespread acceptance and implementation of the goals?

What Do We Know?

There is one mention of students with disabilities in the first goals report; there are two mentions in the second goals report. This can be interpreted at least two ways. Either the authors of these reports intended rhetoric relating to all students to include those with disabilities or they intended rhetoric to apply to virtually all students except where specifically noted relative to students with disabilities. Regardless, some facts have relevance in considering the national goals and their implications for students with disabilities and educational reform.

- The primary data collection programs used to document progress toward the goals are ones that exclude 40-50% of students with disabilities.

- The ways in which the goals are being interpreted are leading to the widespread conclusion that students with disabilities are not ready to learn, are not capable of achieving world class standards, and are likely to drop out of school. For example, Goal One addresses entrance to school and readiness to learn. The clear implication is that some students enter school not ready to learn. Unquestionably, this is true; but, the difference it makes is the key not the fact. One could argue that all children enter school ready to learn developmental and functional tasks appropriate for their entrance stage of development. In this context, a student cannot enter school not ready to learn. We don't need a system to identify people who are not ready, but one that identifies barriers to progress, and points to services and supports necessary to address the normal variation that appears when all students are seen as ready to learn at different developmental levels.

- The goals may lead to differential treatment of students with disabilities.

- Members of the disability community are voicing increasing concern about what will happen to those they represent when schools focus intensely on attainment of the national goals.

- Clearly the goals are narrowly focused primarily on academic content and success. Work skills, life skills, functional skills, and social skills are largely omitted and for the large portion of the school population that will not go on to post-secondary schooling, they are irrelevant. Or, they will become the focus of "Goals 2001."

What Is Being Done?

The National Center on Educational Outomes has prepared brief reports highlighting data on students with disabilities for each of the national goals, written letters to the National Education Goals Panel, task forces, and NCEST reacting to implications of their work for students with disabilities, and offered to help the National Education Goals Panel prepare their Handbook for Local Goals Report, including special considerations that make goals reports germane for all students.

What Else Can Be Done?

- The rhetoric of the goals is that they are for all students. Any action that Congress takes on the national education goals should first consider the implications for students with disabilities. At the writing of this paper, language was being proposed for Goals 2000 that included specific reference to educational goals for all students and illustrated the need to clarify implications of the goals for students with disabilities.

- If goals lead to high standards and to national tests, then professionals in special and general education need to consider what these mean for students whose developmental circumstances make it very difficult for them to achieve high standards, or whose specific disabilities make it very hard for assessment personnel to determine the extent to which they achieve high standards and national goals.

World Class Standards

National task forces, panels, and committees are encouraging the development of world class standards for pupil performance, especially in basic skills areas. Representatives of professional associations identified with key content areas (e.g., National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) are developing standards. For the most part, students with disabilities are out of sight and out of mind in this important effort. Again, this can be interpreted at least two ways: All means all, or some students with disabilities are to be excluded. Should we have a separate set of standards for students with disabilities, or should we expect a range of performance relative to the standards that are developed? If we have separate standards, how do we keep from reverting to a separate, but equal system where students with disabilities are excluded from schools, classrooms, and life--a system that contradicts even the most conservative views on inclusion.

What Do We Know?

- Math standards are being publicized and materials to support their implementation are being developed. Yet NCTM found in its own survey that 60-65% of its members thought the standards were difficult to implement.

- Experts in math believe the standards are somewhat appropriate for students with disabilities, but not feasible for implementation with most students with disabilities.

- The National Science Standards include the language of "Science for All," yet scientists with disabilities have not been included in the standards-writing activity. Input to the writing committees has been provided through a separate focus group on disability issues.

- Standards in any content area lead to tests - voluntary or mandated. Widespread interest, need, or use of tests, in turn, raises issues regarding inclusion and accommodation.

- High standards can easily be set, it is tougher to get large numbers of students to achieve them.

What Is Being Done?

The National Center on Educational Outomes has provided written input to the critique and consensus committee for the science standards, and has been a part of the focus group on disability issues regarding science standards. We have also examined the extent to which the math standards make sense for students with disabilities, and the relationship between what is taught to students with disabilities and what is measured relative to the national math standards.

What Else Can Be Done?

- If the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC) is approved, individuals with disabilities and professionals with expertise in assessing students with disabilities should be members of the committee.

- Systems and practices in which there are separate standards and exclusion of students with disabilities should be avoided in all efforts to develop and implement world class standards.

- Floating standards based on performance and developmental level should be considered as a method for including students with disabilities in efforts to adopt national standards.

- Constituents of the disability community must come to agreement on a unified position on the issue of standards.

Exclusion in State and National Testing

State and national tests are administered to provide policymakers with information. When any portion of the school population is excluded, serious concerns arise when compiling, reporting, and interpreting scores. Using different definitions or methods for grouping and describing students also causes problems. Should policy decisions be made using inconsistent information with unknown characteristics?

What Do We Know?

- At least 85% of students with disabilities are capable of taking traditional tests given to all others.

- Estimated range of exclusion in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Trial State Assessments in 1990 was 33-87%.

- Most states use large scale assessments and do not include students with disabilities. When students with disabilities are included, their data often are not reported.

- There is extreme variability in participation rates and this suggests inclusion criteria are being employed inconsistently.

What Is Being Done?

The National Center on Educational Outomes has published a report entitled Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in National and State Data Collection Programs, and has met with personnel from the National Center on Education Statistics (NCES) to discuss how to limit exclusion of students with disabilities and also to encourage development of criteria for being consistent in reporting data and making accommodation decisions. NCEO staff members have met with representatives of disability groups to discuss ways to decrease exclusion of students with disabilities in state and national testing, and have commissioned papers on making exclusion and accommodation decisions.

A major NCEO activity included the analysis of how subpopulations of students with disabilities are identified in 19 national databases. NCEO personnel have made suggestions on how to improve this practice and have initiated discussion with the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) on this and other issues.

What Else Can Be Done?

- The extent to which professionals are getting the entire picture when assessment results are presented for purposes of making policy decisions should be consistently and constantly evaluated.
- Criteria to be used in making consistent decisions about exclusion should be developed.
- The extent to which reasonable accommodations can be made in testing so as to enable students with disabilities to participate should be examined.
- Development of a comprehensive assessment system in which data are collected and reported on all students should be considered.
- If any group of students is not included, the data should be aggregated and reported and made public.

All Or Virtually All: Where Do We Stand?

Deciding where students with disabilities should go to school is not a decision that can be made on technical bases. Solving the problems apparent when considering inclusion of students with disabilities in state and federal assessments of education outcomes will not be easy. Treating concerns such as these as part of a broader, more inclusive view of education offers an alternative that at least reduces the likelihood of "marching in place." And, while it is tempting to approach questions related to full-inclusion from a technical basis, they are not technical questions. While it is tempting to argue that it shouldn't be done until benefits of doing it have been proven, it is not a problem that requires cost-benefit solution. While it is tempting to argue that test modifications should not be permitted because they violate the technical boundaries of psychometric practice, again these should not be treated as technical considerations. It is better to view these problems, in the purest sense of what is going on today, from the context that all tests and testing procedures lack perfect technical adequacy. In an imprecise domain, laboring under the pursuit of unattainable ideals is like rolling boulders up a mountain or continually marching in place. A simple solution in cases such as these is often to simply take a step in some direction. Toward this end, consider the following:

To improve assessment of outcomes in America's schools, professionals should avoid any practices that produce, encourage, foster, or facilitate separation among student groups. All students should be expected to take all tests and any modifications permitted for instruction should be considered as reasonable accommodations for testing. A modification used for any test or any assessment procedures should be permitted for all tests, all assessment procedures, and all students. Standards developed for moving one group into the 21st century should be useful in moving any group into the 21st century. Discrimination is against the law; people living in America want it to be. If society expects and allows accommodations in ordinary life, testing agencies and other professional organizations should expect and allow them as well. Scores obtained as part of state and national efforts to assess performance should be reported in fully aggregated (including all students) and disaggregated (by appropriate student group) forms. To do less creates more problems than solutions and simply doesn't make sense as sound educational practice. (Algozzine, 1993, p. 9)

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